

## **CTA, city differ on funds available to fix viaducts**

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Evanston city officials brought in some legislative help last week in an effort to get the Chicago Transit Authority to move forward on repairs to the city's viaducts.

But the two sides offer differing views on what funds are available to undertake the projects.

Officials maintain that CTA and state officials committed to using \$25 million in Build Illinois funds in 1999 toward rebuilding of the structures.

But CTA officials deny that any commitment was reached, although they say they recognize the need to do the viaduct work.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-9th, state Sen. Jeffrey Schoenberg, D-9th, a representative of state Rep. Julie Hamos' office and Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin were among the officials who met privately with CTA President Frank Kruesi and other CTA officials April 14.

Also present were city staff members and three aldermen - Arthur B. Newman, 1st Ward,

Melissa A. Wynne, 3rd, and Steven J. Bernstein, 4th.

At the gathering, CTA officials were presented "with the most recent evidence - a book of pictures that show the rapid deterioration and dangerous conditions of the Evanston viaducts," Schakowsky said in a statement released afterward, "and we made it clear that, more than ever, the CTA must fulfill its commitment in dollars to renovate the Evanston viaducts because this is a serious public safety issue."

Schoenberg is currently vice chairman of both appropriation committees in the Senate. He headed the House Appropriations Committee in 1999 when state and CTA officials gathered at a press conference here to announce use of the Build Illinois funds for the viaduct projects.

He said Tuesday he expects the CTA to live up to that commitment.

"With each passing day they not only become more unsightly but (also) less secure and safe," he said of the viaducts. "I understand the CTA has many spending pressures on the entire system. However, the rebirth of downtown Evanston (where one viaduct is prominently located) and the condition of the other viaducts make this an essential priority."

The six main viaducts are located at Main, Greenleaf, Dempster, Davis, Church and Grove streets.

Fifteen other viaducts along the CTA's Purple Line, between Mulford and Isabella streets, also need rehabilitation, officials said.

Robyn Ziegler, CTA spokeswoman, said agency representatives were at the meeting to hear Evanston's concerns about the condition of the viaducts and other work needed.

The CTA, she said, is already fulfilling a commitment to reconstruct the Main Street viaduct, where work is in the planning stage.

As for the other viaducts, they "are not off the table," Ziegler said.

"We agree that there is a need to take care of the other viaducts," she said. "Those projects are part of our capital improvement plan, which unfortunately includes approximately \$2 billion in unmet capital needs."

She said the CTA is working with legislators, including Schakowsky and Schoenberg, to be able to find the funds to meet those needs.

Suzanne M. Te Beau, vice president of government affairs and affirmative action for the CTA, informed Mayor Lorraine H. Morton in February that design and construction funding for six the viaducts initially was to be included in the CTA's 2002-2006 capital improvement program, according to a copy of the letter obtained by the Review.

However, she informed Morton that during preparation of the plan, "it became necessary to reprogram resources for the (program) in order to meet emerging and increased needs across the system.

"In managing the reprogramming, CTA focused on balancing the impact of funding decisions throughout the service area," she said.

Te Beau said that based on the reprogramming decisions, much of the viaduct construction would have to be deferred beyond the scope of the 2003-2007 capital improvement plan. The plan, though, would provide funding for some design work at the viaducts, she said, as well as construction for funding at Main.

The other five viaducts will "remain in the CTA's long-range capital plan as projects to be fully funded in future years," Te Beau said.

The CTA has shored up five viaducts, adding steel supports over the years, said David Jennings, the city's Public Works director, who also attended the meeting.

Because of the special shoring, certain sections of track are designated as "slow sections," where CTA trains must run at reduced speeds because of the poor condition, Jennings said.

In some places, "you can't get two cars abreast," Bernstein said.

"It's a traffic control problem. It's obviously an aesthetic problem. It really doesn't set us up in the best light."

Bernstein also has concerns about safety problems from chipping and falling concrete from the structures.

"Every time I go by," he said, "I look on the ground for concrete that has fallen off."